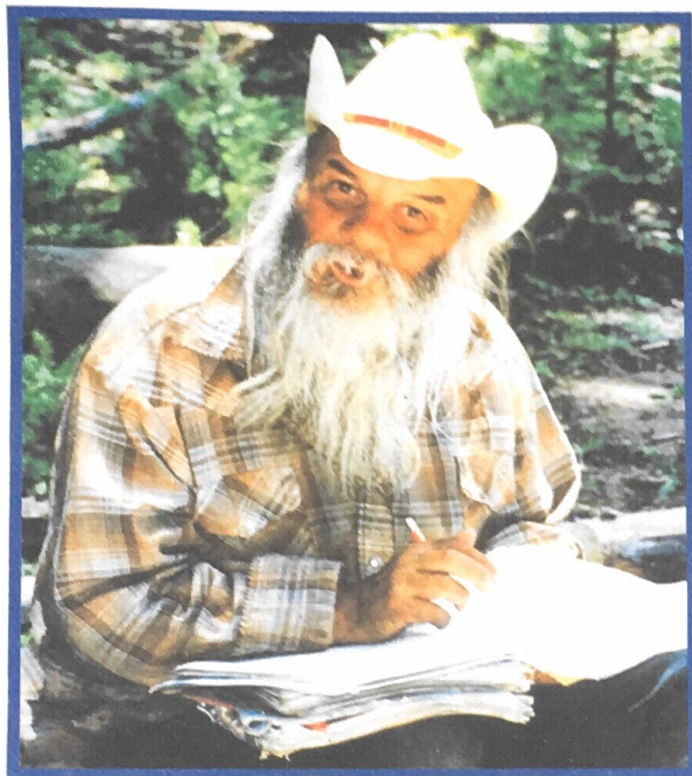




# Rainbow Family

## Life Stories



by Jodey Bateman.  
Interviews with Rainbow  
Family of Living Light  
folks conducted between  
1977 and 2008.

Scanned in 2018.

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GREY EAGLE - "I Found My People"  
- His photos of the Gatherings  
have been in slide shows around  
the country so people can see what  
Rainbow is about.



GREY EAGLE I Found My People

[His photos of the gatherings have been in slide shows around the country so people can see what Rainbow is about. He is one of the most active people in Texas, especially the Dallas area, in encouraging people to go to the gatherings.]

Here's the official information - Grey Eagle (William Eugene Stephens) born November 6, 1925, 11:55 p.m., Amarillo, Texas. I'm not good at reading astrological charts, but I've been told that mine is very unusual.

I was born at home on a big oak bed that Mother's still got at Childress, Texas. I'll probably end up with it sometime. My parents are A. E. and Alice Marie Stephens. Daddy had a fourth grade education. He came to west Texas as a cowboy at the age of 13. He wintered his first bunch of cattle in a line shack with his brother. Later he became an executive of the Kelly-Springfield Manufacturing Company.

I was sick a lot. My first memories are being in the hospital. The year after I was two, I got infantile paralysis and then rheumatic fever and then severe poisoning from spoiled Bulgarian buttermilk that a doctor said might be good for me. We moved to the country when I was four. I couldn't run till I was six.

We got a half-section of land and broke it out. It was virgin land, it shouldn't have been plowed up. It was in the Panhandle, two miles from the Oklahoma border. Talk about setting yourself up for the Dust Bowl. We bought nine Jersey milk cows and built a house and a barn. We liked Clacked \$2,000 paying for it. Man, we were in high cotton. We had one of the first radios in our part of the country and I remember 30 or 40 people in our yard listening to the Grand Old Opry.



Then the crash of '29 hit. We put our first crop in in the spring of '30. We farmed with mules. We disconnected the electric lights. We were strictly a coal oil [kerosene] family. We were immediately poor, but there were many people in our part of the country that had nothing to eat.

We were brush arbor Methodists. The Methodist church South was very fundamentalist - totally different from the Methodist church today. We built a brush arbor and had a revival every summer. The Baptists got the brush arbor first because there were more of them, then the Methodists. When my dad tried to join the Methodists, the deacon tried to get him to say he would not play or attend baseball games on Sunday. My dad walked away and wouldn't join. Later on, he did.

The summer when I was seven, I was riding a horse in shorts. I was anemic - as white as a sheet in that heat. A Campbellite deacon rode up in a wagon and told me I was going to hell because I wore shorts and my parents were going because they played cards. That's where I first began questioning that narrow Fundamentalist God. I never could see that I needed to be saved, because as far as I was concerned I had never been lost.

When Roosevelt was installed [as President] in '33, my mother, as one of the few people in the county with any education, got a job taking a census of all the poor people. They paid \$5 a day for her and the car. I rode with her. I saw the utter futility of the lives of the people who had lost everything in the Depression and the Dust Bowl. It was grim.

Their animals died for lack of water. Sickly kids died from dust pneumonia. If you've never been in a true dust storm... I've sat in a room with a hundred watt light bulb burning and all you could see for the dust was vague



shoes moving on the other side of the room. Then the sheriff came to move them off their land. (P2)

That summer they had food stamps and my mother went around telling people be sure and eat tomatoes with their corn bread and beans so it would make a complete diet. People were ignorant then. They were country people, but they didn't have much survival skills. Mother and Dad's attitudes saved us.

Through bargaining and trading and canning our own food, we ate better than we ever did.

A lot of people had goiters from not enough iodine in their diet. The government gave them iodized salt and the rumor started that the government was giving them the iodized salt to stop them from having kids. My mother went around and spoke in the schools and churches to tell them it was safe to eat iodized salt.

We financed a crop with the money Mother made. The crop blew out and we lost the farm and had to move off in 1934.

Dad got a job carrying the star mail route from Wellington through Quail, Texas. Wellington, Texas, did not allow the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] and the WPA [Works Progress Administration] to build them a swimming pool because they would not build two - one for women and one for men.

In 1936, we moved to Amarillo. I had gotten a strand of beautiful fantail goldfish from a rich aunt and went around knocking on every door in Amarillo selling goldfish. After a year or two of everybody doing what they could to make a living, things got better. I sold caramel corn and worked in cafes. My dad walked four miles to work three hours in a dairy for 75 cents and a bottle of milk. Daddy couldn't get on the WPA because he still owned some land, but he leased some mules to the WPA. He found out quick they'd ruin them.



I had my first sexual experience, true screwing, when I was 12. I got a nickel stick of candy for Christmas - a foot long - and I gave some of it to this little black girl to go down in the ravine with me. I started to high school in 1939. Before that I took the Calvert Home Study Course. I got a smattering of culture from it that's never left me. I didn't get much out of high school.

I worked summers as a ranch hand breaking horses and as a park attendant in Palo Duro State Park. I went before the county judge and got a driver's license when I was 14. I was one of eight kids who had cars at my high school - one of two boys who had cars and weren't rich.

There was a college at Canyon near Palo Duro State Park that had 120 girls and seven boys - the other boys were all off at the war. I had my pick of the girls at Canyon. You could drive to Canyon with a bottle of whiskey and see a girl and open the car door and she'd be ready to party. They passed an ordinance in Canyon that a man couldn't talk on the street to a woman if he didn't know her. In some ways I haven't gotten over the damage that period did to me. Women were considered disposable then.

That's where I started drinking. I got drunk for the first time when I was 16. It was Mother-in-Law Day in Amarillo and Eleanor Roosevelt was the guest. She rode a float. I went out with a bunch of the guys in the high school band after the parade. The rest of the guys had one or two beers. I got drunk and threw up and disgraced myself.

We used marijuana normally. It was available.



Nobody thought anything about it. It grew wild all over west Texas. The funny thing about marijuana - there were two or three hamburger stands across from the school that sold it - a nickel a joint and three for a dime. You could buy about four ounces of it wrapped in newspaper in Mexican town in Amarillo for a dollar. We called it a twist. We didn't think about it. I saw the movie "Reefer Madness" in 1937.

I saw one freak out in my life from marijuana - a 16 year old Mexican kid I throw papers with. He smoked it for the first time and cut a friend of his damn near to ribbons. I didn't like marijuana so much. When I discovered wine, I quit using marijuana, I liked wine so much.

In high school me and a friend of mine ordered three peyote buttons - from an ad in the back of a pulp western magazine. All we knew about peyote was we read about it in Zane Gray, so we didn't pull the hairs out of it. I got 20 minutes' worth of high out of it and then got violently ill.

I got pretty rowdy in those days. To get me out of the city and the bars, my folks loved for me to work cowboying. The fall I was 17, I went with a friend to Albuquerque to the New Mexico State Fair and Rodeo and registered as a bronc rider to get into the barbecues and the dances free. After five days of partying, we was drunk enough the last of it, we decided we'd go ride. My horse threw me as high as the damn stands and I was all stove up, my ribs broke in. I had a motorcycle next year. I broke my collar bone on it and when I got out, I found my daddy had sold my motorcycle.

I got in the state tennis finals and discovered the late 20's ish and early 30's ish women whose men were off at war and I just walked knee deep in that. I was in a group of kids in high school that by the time I went off to war, all the guys had slept with all the gals.



To keep from getting drafted, I joined the Navy. I went to Hawaii and ran a dice game. Then I went to the South Pacific on a gas transport. Our sister ship got blew up in Ulithi and went down with everybody on it. Then I got transferred to a ship that was control ship for the invasion of Saipan and then was in the landings in the Lingayan Gulf in the Philippines. I got blown down and my head kind of cut and qualified for a Purple Heart. It was actually from one of our own depth charges.

We did a lot of anti-submarine work with convoys. I went to New Zealand, the prettiest place I'd ever seen in my life. We went to Calcutta—how much of India do you see when you're ashore for six hours and you're drunk?

At the close of the war we sailed into Inchon, Korea, the day after the armistice was signed and landed troops. Then we were river mouth control at the mouth of the Huang Ho River in China for six months. We'd go to a village and about 200 Japanese troops would surrender to us. I was in less than four or five days of being the last white western troops in northern China. I took a coal-burning bus up to see the Great Wall.

I'll never forget this little kid I saw starving to death in the street. He was six and no bigger than a three year old. People had enough respect for life to wait until he died, then they stripped him of everything he had. I saw bodies of people who had starved to death in front of this big Buddhist temple with a band of gold around it six feet wide—there was tons of gold on that thing. I became very antagonistic toward God.

On leave from the service, I married a high school girl from this group that everybody had slept together. I got out of the service and they gave me my high school diploma to keep me from coming back. My wife met me at Astoria,



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Oregon, and we went to her uncle's in Santa Monica, California. He was the postmaster and head Democrat there. He took us to all the fancy places in Hollywood.

We went to San Francisco and I hired out for the crew that painted the Golden Gate Bridge. They walked you up to the top of the bridge and if you could stand the heights and didn't turn around, they hired you. Then my mom and dad talked me into coming back to Amarillo and working in one of their cafes. My wife and I camped all over New Mexico and Colorado. Because of my father's health, we sold the restaurant in Amarillo and bought a farm in Hereford, Texas.

We made a crop there in '48 and '49. I took the commodity credit grain check for \$15,153 and came to Dallas on a drunken spree. When I got back, we had a land payment we couldn't make, so we sold the farm and moved to Childress, Texas, and I got a temporary job on the railroad. I came in on the tail end of the steam engine era in railroading. I was promoted to engineer in 1957. That was the last year the engineers had to take the examination on the steam engine book as well as the diesel book.

My first wife and I had three children. The last one was born in 1951. We were drinking awful heavy. I still hung around with the group I was with in high school. We did a lot of swapping and I was a Methodist Sunday School teacher. My wife left in April of '53 and left my children with my parents.

I started getting in a lot of trouble in '57, police bringing me home and all that. Mother and Dad suggested that my kids would be a lot better off if I would leave Childress. I was on my way to Houston to ship out in the Merchant Marine. I stopped in Wichita Falls to work on the railroad. That's where I came in contact with Alcoholics Anonymous. I had four and a half years of sobriety after that.

I got married in Dallas and that's when I started getting



into photography. I got drunk again, but I had pneumonia so bad I had to stop. I haven't had a drink since September 25, 1963. I was very antagonistic towards God or a higher power for a while. Then I had the help of a higher power staying away from alcohol. I re-read the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous every year in my sobriety week.

I've worked out of Dallas ever since then. In 1954, I was a redneck VFW post commander in Childress, Texas. When I started getting drunk and put in jail a lot, drunks got their heads beat on a lot then. I noticed that as much as we got beat on - the whites who were drunk - the blacks got beat on twice as much as we did. They were lucky to get out alive. That's what awakened my social conscience on civil rights.

The Freedom Riders used my place in Dallas for rest and recuperation. I carried a bunch of clothes for the blacks over to Little Rock. They killed two black brothers there and some old ladies got teargassed. I rolled up into a ball. The cops beat me more on the back than on the head. But it was nothing special.

I got firmly involved with the Dallas Peace Committee in 1970 through people I had met casually in the civil rights movement. They were mostly Unitarians and they led me to The Unitarian Church. Through them I got to meet some fine people like Pete Seeger and David Harris. The Dallas Peace Committee held silent vigils in Dealy Plaza right across from where Kennedy was killed. The Nazis would come throw red ink on us.

I went to the first anti-war demonstration at Killeen, Texas, outside of Fort Hood. It was in May, 1971. It was sponsored by the Oleo Strut coffee house. That was the first place I ever really got scared. You see, I took my wife and my stepson with me. The demonstration got permission to use a vacant lot. As it happened, it was fairly non-violent. Every time Pete Seeger would try to perform, the Highway Patrol helicopter would come down so



low the dirt would blow on the audience and the noise would drown him out. Finally we had to go back inside the Oleo Strut.

They deputized everybody in the county, several hundred of them. There were these old cowboy types who had been deputized with pistols stuck in their belts and gas masks and brig clubs. They almost arrested my wife and Johnny Santangel of the Dallas Peace Committee and I for obstructing the sidewalk. I got arrested without my wife, but I didn't stay in jail long, just overnight. One guy named Tom Flower got 28 days. They arrested some sisters and strip-searched them. There was a major's lady who got arrested with us. When she heard they were strip-searching, she looked the sheriff straight in the eye and said, "You treat me like the others." You know how rank is in Killeen, Texas.

I was just starting to wake up. I still wore short hair. In '71 they started hassling kids for having long hair and firing them from their jobs. I had union protection because I was on the railroad, so I let my hair grow. All that happened was I got stopped and arrested a few times.

Then the war was over and everything kind of settled down, but I was still interested in peace. I knew perfectly well everything wasn't going to go the way they said it would. In the winter of '74-'75, there was a little squib in Mother Earth News that said, "Rainbow World Peace Gathering in June. Send \$2 for a map and invitation." It gave a North Little Rock address.

Jimmer and a bunch of people in North Little Rock lived all winter on those \$2 that people sent in. I sent the \$2 and I did get an invitation and a map which was totally wrong. So I went to Eureka Springs where I had a friend. In a bar there Tony Angel had put up another map and it was wrong too. Then I called the sheriff's department at Harrison and they knew exactly where it was.

I walked in fairly straight-looking with a load of cameras and I was home. I don't know how to say what happened. How do you explain it? I had found my people. Within a day or two after I



got there, Jayson and I carried some garbage up the trail around nightfall and brought some food back. We started out as strangers and came back as blood brothers.

In Arkansas when we got incoming rifle fire from the south rim, it was my suggestion for us to get the women and the children into a circle. That was from my experience in the civil rights movement.

That September I went back through Stillwater, Oklahoma, with my wife and we met up with that whole unbelievable Stillwater scene - Oro, Jimmer and everybody that was there. We showed the pictures I took at the gathering.

In late November I was in central Texas. I had a long - over two hour and a half - out of the body experience. I was doing some organic mesquite and I passed into and became a rock - a huge boulder - and became totally aware of the meaning of Mother Earth in all its ramifications.

This first year of my introduction to Rainbow, I had several mystical things happen. In December my daughter by my first marriage OD'd on purpose and was in intensive care for five days. We thought we had a human vegetable for a while. I went out on the fourth day and prayed to the Father Sun and Mother Earth and gave water and blood sacrifice from my own body with fruit and when I got back to town, the telephone was ringing. She had responded to deep pain, so they knew she wasn't going to be a human vegetable.

My blessings just continued, meeting people in the Rainbow. Partially because of Rainbow, I stopped doing anything but organic drugs in 1976 - mushrooms, marijuana, cactus. The last two hits of acid I took, Randolph gave me in the Montana Gathering parking lot as I was leaving. After Montana, I had a marvellous trip with four Rainbow ladies - Picker Nancy, who used to play with Henry the Fiddler, Julie and Little Nancy. I dropped them off at



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various places. I came back to New Mexico with Little Nancy to see Jay Sun and Feather.

My first wife and I had done a lot of swapping. My second wife and I decided we wouldn't sleep with anyone else. Up to the time we divorced, I never did. I slept with Little Nancy naked in my arms, but we never did anything.

My wife didn't go to any of the gatherings. She wasn't really interested. She was going to the New Mexico Gathering with me. She had her pack packed and we were leaving that morning. The night we were gonna leave, her father had a heart attack and she had to go to Amarillo. I went on to the gathering. I will forever wonder if our lives would have been different if she had gone.

At the New Mexico Gathering I had \$148 or so in a hat that had been turned over to me to keep. This man who claimed he was a doctor came to me and said he needed the money for medical supplies. He didn't tell me he was leaving. I gave it to him. The story I got was that they stopped the dude and he said Grey Eagle had given him the money to ease his road because he was such a good boy. That was when Barry and Sunny actually tumbled that he was running off with the money.

That fall my wife and I separated. We got a divorce January of '78. We had matured in different directions although we cared very much for each other. It's difficult to see why people can't stay together when they're still in love with each other. We fed on each other's weaknesses and it was destructive to both of us. That parting was the only solution.

One thing Rainbow did for me - I had been totally hating the railroad I worked for to where it was physically damaging to me. The Rainbow saved my sanity and enabled me to find peace within myself and change my attitude toward my railroad job. Of course this was about the time I started getting into my studio and doing some fairly meaningful photographic work there.



In 1978 I took Laura Neal McCollum and her son Chris to the Oregon Gathering with me. The gathering was very strange on many levels. I was close to the operations tip, but I wasn't involved. I went to Love Israel's Council of Chiefs of Tribes in his tent. There were only two women there. I brought one. Sunny came with Barry. Love would like the old timers at the gathering to have all the say and all the power. He wanted a hierarchy of the Rainbow and there ain't no such thing.

Arizona was the first gathering where I worked the hot seat and really got involved. I took Mary Lou Hoffman and her son Karl to the gathering. I became involved with the outside chores like taking Barry to Springerville and raising money to pay for the stolen cow. Barry came charging out of the operations tip and said to Medicine Story and I, "All right, we've got to have \$900 for the cow by tomorrow. Get it." So we got it. I won't go into details as to how, but we got it.

I spent most of that gathering working outside with the sheriff and the justice of the peace and people like that. It was the first time I ever stayed for most of the clean-up—the only time. It was down to about 300 people when we left. I saw Little Nancy and her husband Bob as they were leaving Jaysun and Feather's bus. Nancy and Bob's first child is supposed to be my god child.

In June of 1980, Feather and Grasshopper and Shawn rode the Greyhound bus to Childress, Texas, where my parents live. I was visiting my parents. Feather and the kids came back to Dallas with me and stayed here several days and then rode to West Virginia to the gathering with Mary Lou and I.

In 1981, Jodine Blount and Mary Lou and I met Jaysun and Feather and Carleton in Socorro, New Mexico, and went as far as Boulder and left Mary Lou at her brother's and we went to the Washington Gathering. In some ways that



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gathering was more spiritual than any of the others. I was standing with Jeanie and about 30 or 40 other very strong spiritual people. There was a reporter and a photographer from Seattle. Jeanie was in charge of the press that year. She introduced me to these people. This Army helicopter started coming straight in. The Army and the National Guard had closed the area for helicopter flights. The reporter wanted to know what the helicopter's markings were, so the photographer and I were watching it through a telephoto lens like a telescope. He was flying straight at us. Jeanie and a number of people raised their hands like, "Go way!"

The helicopter made a maneuver they tell me is impossible for a helicopter to make. It was like it ran into an invisible dome when they raised their hands. It went over on its side and then completely reversed its course.

Last year, 1982, was kind of a downer for me. I got sick and couldn't go to the Idaho gathering, but everybody there helped me. I got well on the Fourth of July.

It's such a difference between doing fashion photography and the naturalness of the Rainbow people - particularly the women and the children. For fashion models, a pimple is a major tragedy. Rainbow played a part in my decision to get out of fashion photography. I only do two shows a year now.

Garrick sends me invitations to the gathering as soon as they are off the press and I have them reprinted and I distribute 1,000 of them in Dallas and Austin.

I'm not a street freak and never will be one. I have a different approach to the Rainbow, but the gathering has been the most beautiful thing I've ever found in my lifetime, particularly through the pictures. I'm blessed with being able to remember every picture I've ever taken of the Rainbow and through looking at them it stays very fresh and alive in my mind and my spirit.

EGrey Eagle has now retired from the railroad and moved



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to the White Hawk Community, a group of solar-heated underground houses, that has been set up north of Dallas in a rural area. Since he recovered from hepatitis, he has been attending the national and regional Rainbow Gatherings regularly.]